

QUMRAN

The Essenes. The area of Qumran may have been settled as far back as the time of Joshua; some have identified it with either Secacah or the City of Salt, desert cities mentioned in the tribal allotment for Judah (Josh. 15:61-62). The earliest building activity discovered at Qumran dates back to the eighth century B.C. Perhaps the construction was from the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah, who “built towers in the desert and dug many cisterns” (2 Chron. 26:10). The site is often identified today as Khirbet Qumran; the Arabic term *khirbet* means “ruins.” Qumran, which overlooks the northwest corner of the Dead Sea, is about nine miles south of Jericho and thirteen miles east of Jerusalem.

It is generally thought that, around the time of Christ, Qumran was a commune inhabited by members of the Essene sect. Pliny’s statement supports this contention:

On the west side of the Dead Sea, but out of range of the noxious exhalations of the coast, is the solitary tribe of the Essenes, which is remarkable beyond all the other tribes in the whole world, as it has no women and has renounced all sexual desire, has no money, and has only palm trees for company. Day by day the throng of refugees is recruited to an equal number by numerous accessions of persons tired of life and driven thither by the waves of fortune to adopt their manners. Thus . . . a race in which no one is born lives on forever; so prolific for their advantage is other men’s weariness of life! Lying below them [that is, these Essenes] was formerly the town of Engedi (Pliny *Natural History* 5.15.73).

The Essenes were a conservative sect of Judaism that existed from about 150 B.C. to A.D. 70, most likely stemming from the Hasidim. (The Hasidim were conservative Jews who supported the Maccabean Revolt, opposing Seleucid attempts to force Hellenization upon the Jews.) The Jewish philosopher Philo said that the Essenes derived “their name from their piety” and that they numbered about 4,000 members (Philo *Every Good Man Is Free* 75).

Josephus described this sect in some detail (*Wars* 2.8.2-13; see Philo *Apology for the Jews* 11.1-18). He wrote that the Essenes were a close knit fellowship, having more concern for one another than the other parties of Judaism had for their members. The sect was spread throughout various towns and villages. They emphasized the importance of controlling one’s passions and denying physical pleasures. Many in the sect neglected marriage, although some did not. (One order argued that if all men were to renounce marriage, mankind would cease to



View of the Dead Sea from Qumran



exist.) However, Essenes were known to adopt children and educate them according to their beliefs.

Before members of this party would speak to others each morning, they would engage in prayer. They despised worldly wealth and put their money in a common treasury. These men liked to dress in white, especially during their assemblies. Prior to these gatherings, they would undergo ritual washings for purification. It was unlawful for anyone to eat of the meal prior to a member saying grace.

The Essenes were people of integrity, who avoided taking oaths in God's name. They would say, "He who cannot be believed without [swearing by] God, is already condemned." Respect for elders was highly stressed, as was the strict observance of the Sabbath day. Those entering the sect were required a total of three years probation before acceptance into the group. If a member did not maintain the practices of the group, he was excommunicated. The Essenes were willing to suffer for their faith, as evidenced by their harsh treatment at the hands of the Romans in the First Jewish War. (The settlement was overrun during that period, perhaps about A.D. 68.)

In the New Testament, the Jewish sects emphasized are the Pharisees and the Sadducees; the Essenes are not mentioned. (Other groups connected to Judaism included the Zealots, the Herodians, and the Samaritans.) Perhaps the New Testament does not mention the Essenes because they did not come into conflict with Jesus and his disciples; many of them were secluded in the desert. The Essenes viewed the temple establishment—which was controlled by the Sadducees—as being apostate. They anticipated that God would quickly avenge his faithful people by destroying Roman rule; the Essenes would then form the nucleus of the new people of God. They were dedicated to the study of the Hebrew Scriptures, and interpreted them in light of their own situation (a method known as *halakah*, which means "walk"), instead of using historical exegesis. The Essenes believed in predestination or fate, whereas the Pharisees took a moderate position and the Sadducees were basically deists (Josephus *Antiquities* 13.5.9). The Essenes used a solar calendar, in contrast to a lunar calendar.

Some speculate that John the Baptist may have lived among the Essenes, perhaps at Qumran or some other commune (like Ein Feshkha, a few miles to the south). While the Scriptures do not specifically tell us this, the idea is not beyond the realm of possibility. Several key factors have been noted (McRay, 160-61). (1) John's parents were older when he was born (Lk. 1:7, 18), so they may have died before he reached adulthood. The Essenes were known for adopting children into their community. (2) The Essenes would often deny themselves physical pleasures. John was an ascetic in diet, abstaining from wine and eating locusts and wild honey (Mt. 3:4; Lk. 7:33). (3) The Essenes emphasized righteous living and ceremonial washing (ritual

immersion). While not exactly the same, John came on the scene preaching a baptism (immersion) connected to repentance (Mt. 3:2, 8, 11). (4) Both the Essenes and John were at home in the Judean wilderness (Mt. 3:1). (5) The Essenes were opposed to the religious establishment in Jerusalem, which had become corrupt. Similarly, when some of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to the place John was baptizing, he exclaimed, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?” (Mt. 3:7). (6) Isaiah 40:3 was an important text to the Essenes at Qumran, as it was to John. The Essenes, by their communion, were preparing the way in the desert for God’s coming judgment on the Romans. John, by preaching repentance and baptism, was preparing the way for the Lord—God’s sending the Messiah, Jesus (Jn. 1:23). John, however, never called people to communal living.

The Excavations. Qumran was excavated in the 1950s, not long after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The buildings there were probably not used for housing. It is generally thought that most of the members of the community lived in natural caves in the area, underground chambers that had been cut out of the rock, and tents.

Watchtower. The watchtower was made from sloping stones. The settlement itself was surrounding by ravines, which served as a protective barrier.



Watchtower



Scriptorium

Scriptorium. A room known as the scriptorium was used for copying the Hebrew Scriptures as well as other documents important to the community at Qumran. Most of these scrolls were made from parchment—that is, animal skin (typically sheep or goat). Others were produced from papyrus. This kind of paper was made from papyrus reeds, which were cut, flattened, interwoven, and then glued. Ink wells were found in the scriptorium, which helped to identify the function of the room. The ink would have been made from a mixture of soot, gum, oil, and water. Styluses were used for writing, being made either from sharpened reeds or metal. Documents were written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Also found in the scriptorium was a table that was about 15 feet long.



Ink Wells from Qumran
(Israel Museum, Jerusalem)

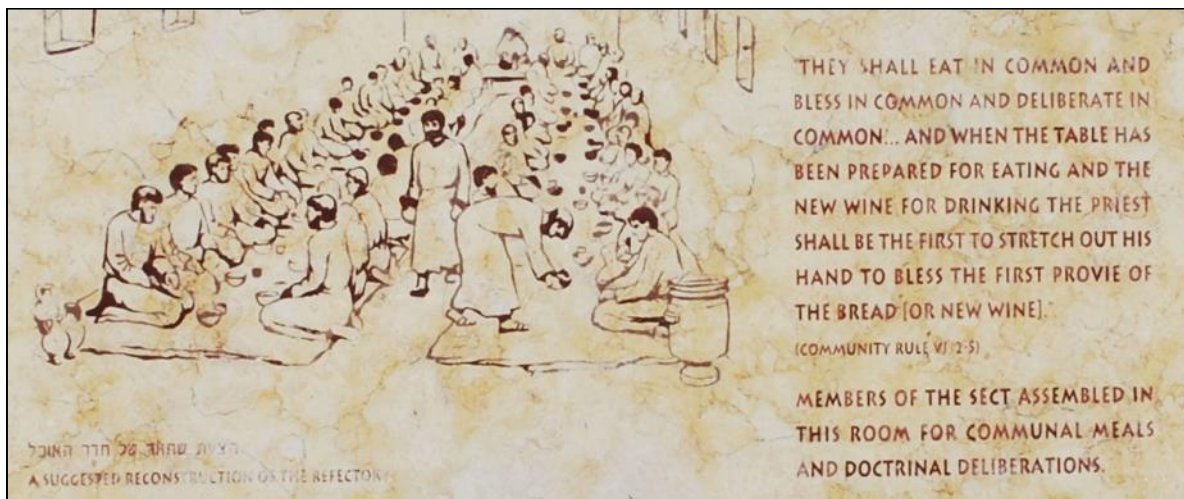
Pantry. A pantry (or pottery storeroom) yielded over 1,000 dining vessels, which included over 700 bowls, 210 plates, and 75 beakers.



Refectory. The refectory (dining hall), a room measuring 72 by 15 feet, was the place where communal meals were shared. It was adjacent to the pantry. The refectory was likely also used as a synagogue. The base of a podium was discovered at the west end of the room. Philo described the Essenes' meetings in this way: "There they sit according to their age in classes, the younger sitting under the elder, and listening with eager attention in becoming order. Then one, indeed, takes up the holy volume and reads it, and another of the men of the greatest experience comes forward and explains what is not very intelligible. . . . Thus the people are taught piety, and holiness, and justice" (Philo *Every Good Man Is Free* 81-82).



Refectory (Dining Hall)



THEY SHALL EAT IN COMMON AND BLESS IN COMMON AND DELIBERATE IN COMMON... AND WHEN THE TABLE HAS BEEN PREPARED FOR EATING AND THE NEW WINE FOR DRINKING THE PRIEST SHALL BE THE FIRST TO STRETCH OUT HIS HAND TO BLESS THE FIRST PROVIE OF THE BREAD [OR NEW WINE].

(COMMUNITY RULE VI/2-5)

MEMBERS OF THE SECT ASSEMBLED IN THIS ROOM FOR COMMUNAL MEALS AND DOCTRINAL DELIBERATIONS.

מצעדת שחורגת אל חדר האוכל
A SUGGESTED RECONSTRUCTION OF THE REFECTORY

Pottery Workshop. The clay was first washed in a basin, which was fed by a small cistern. Then, it was left to cure in a storage pit. The final mix was made in a shallow tank, which was located beside a circular pit where the potter's wheel was set. There were two kilns, one for domestic pottery and the other for larger jars (such as those in which the Dead Sea Scrolls were found).



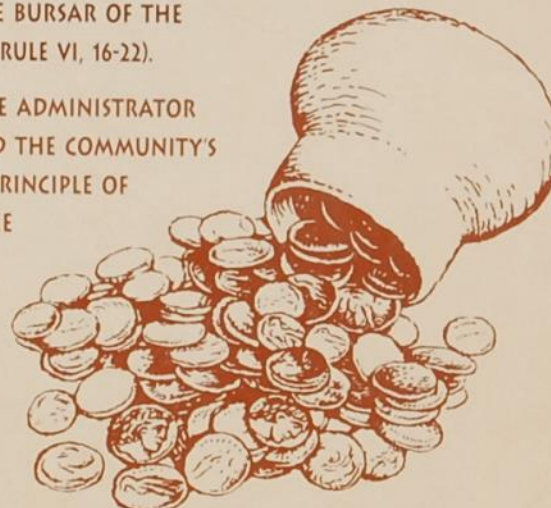
Pottery Kiln

Treasury. A room was found with three pottery jars containing a total of 560 coins. This was the common treasury where the resources of Qumran's members were gathered together.



"AFTER HE HAS ENTERED THE COUNCIL OF THE COMMUNITY...HE SHALL NOT HAVE ANY SHARE OF THE PROPERTY OF THE CONGREGATION. ...AND IF IT BE HIS DESTINY TO ENTER THE COMPANY OF THE COMMUNITY...HIS PROPERTY AND EARNINGS SHALL BE HANDED OVER TO THE BURSAR OF THE CONGREGATION..." (COMMUNITY RULE VI, 16-22).

THESE ROOMS BELONGED TO THE ADMINISTRATOR RESPONSIBLE FOR FINANCES AND THE COMMUNITY'S SPIRIT, THE MOST IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE OF WHICH WAS COLLECTIVITY. THREE POTTERY JUGS CONTAINING 560 SILVER COINS WERE DISCOVERED IN THIS ROOM. THIS APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN THE CENTRAL TREASURY OF THE SECTARIANS.





Cisterns. Many cisterns have been found at Qumran. Water was channeled via an aqueduct from the wadis (dry riverbeds that flooded when it rained) into settling basins; from there it was stored in cisterns. This water supported the needs of the community; it was used for consumption as well as ceremonial washing.



Miqwaoth. Several ritual baths (pl. *miqwaoth*; sg. *miqweh*) can be found at Qumran, which served the ritual purification needs of the community members. Like modern Christian baptistries, these have steps leading down into them. However, sometimes the steps have a divider (or dividers) in the middle to separate the unclean going down into the immersion pool from the clean coming up on the other side (see Mishnah *Shekalim* 8.2).





מקווה טהרה
RITUAL BATH



...והם עושים את מלאכתם בלי הרף עד תמש שעות ביום, ואחרי זאת הם מתאספים אל מקום אחד וחוגגים אזור-בד ורוחצים את בשרם במים קרים ואחרי טהרתם הם פונים כולם למדור מיוחד... והם הולכים בטהרה כהולך למקום קדוש ובאים אל מקום הסעודה הזה." (יוסף בן מתתיהו, מלחמת היהודים ברומאים ב, ת, ה)
אנשי כת קומראן הקפידו בטהרה שלפני הסעודה ולכן היו ביישוב שבעה מקוואות טהרה, שרובם היו בקרבת חדר האוכל.

...THEY LABOR WITH GREAT DILIGENCE TILL THE FIFTH HOUR, AFTER WHICH THEY ASSEMBLE THEMSELVES INTO ONE PLACE; AND WHEN THEY HAVE CLOTHED THEMSELVES IN WHITE VEILS, THEY BATH THEIR BODIES IN COLD WATER. AND AFTER THIS PURIFICATION IS OVER, THEY MEET TOGETHER IN AN APARTMENT OF THEIR OWN...WHILE THEY GO IN A PURE MANNER, INTO THE DINING ROOM; AS INTO A CERTAIN HOLY TEMPLE...

(JOSEPHUS FLAVIUS, THE WAR OF THE JEWS 2:8:5).

MEMBERS OF THE SECT WERE STRICT IN THEIR OBSERVANCE OF THE LAWS OF RITUAL PURITY AND MAINTAINED SEVEN RITUAL BATHS, LOCATED MOSTLY IN THE VICINITY OF THE REFECTORY.

הצעת שחזור של מקווה הטהרה

A SUGGESTED RECONSTRUCTION OF THE RITUAL BATH







Cemeteries. The main cemetery on the east side of Khirbet Qumran has over a thousand graves in which only men were buried. Two smaller burial sites, however, included men, women, and children (DeVries, 312). This raises an intriguing question: Were a few of the members of the Qumran community married, or do these smaller sites reflect later Bedouin burials? We may never know.

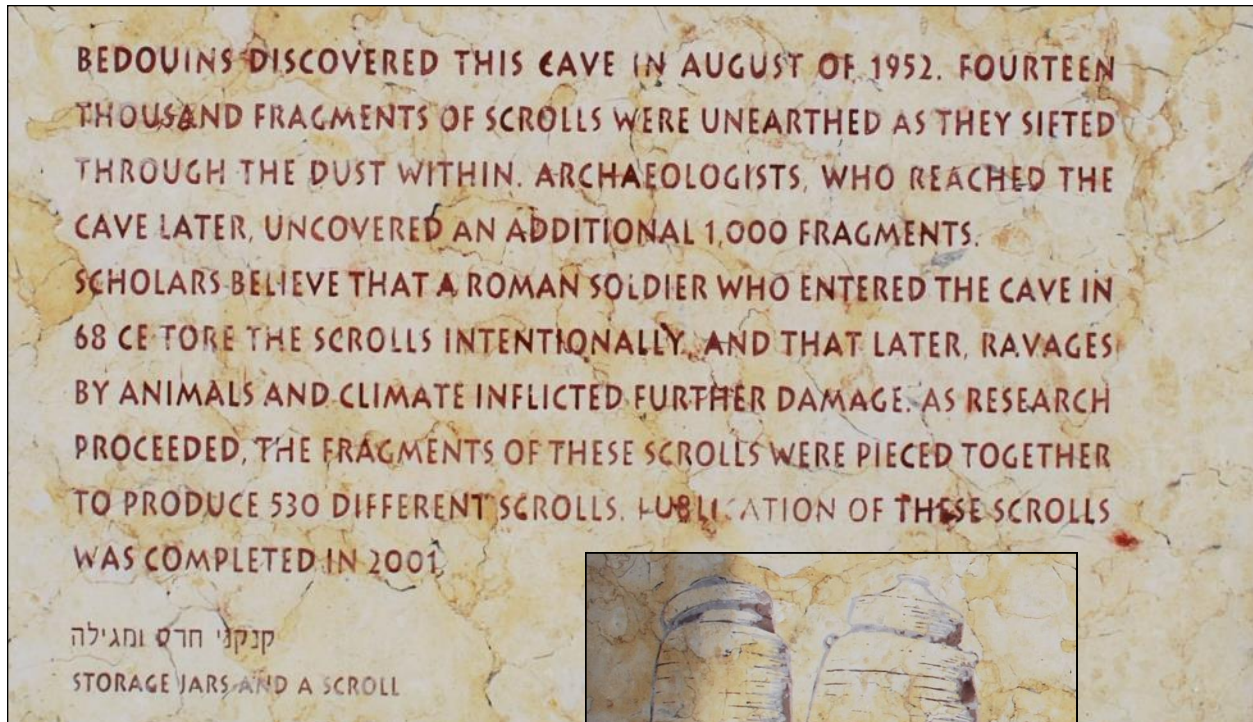
Discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In 1947, Bedouin shepherds were searching for lost sheep in the area of Qumran and threw a rock into a cave trying to locate one of them. (It has become known as Cave 1.) The boys heard a cracking sound, and, upon later investigation, it turned out to be a clay jar with ancient scrolls inside. The arid environment and clay jar had protected the ancient scrolls for nearly 1,900 years (being hidden about A.D. 70).

The shepherds took their find to Bethlehem. Eventually, the scrolls came to Kando, a cobbler and antiques dealer. He eventually opened a nice souvenir and antiques shop in Jerusalem. As time passed, some of the scrolls were shown to scholars. After Israel became an independent state in 1948, some of the scrolls were acquired by Professor Sukenik, while others came into the possession of his son, Yigael Yadin.

Subsequent investigations in the 1950s and 60s revealed ten more caves housing ancient scrolls. An entire library of 800 volumes was found; out of this number, over 500 were discovered in Cave 4. The dates of the documents ranged from 250 B.C. to A.D. 70. Some of these were complete manuscripts, while others were only fragments. Scholars have laboriously pieced many of the fragments together like jigsaw puzzles.



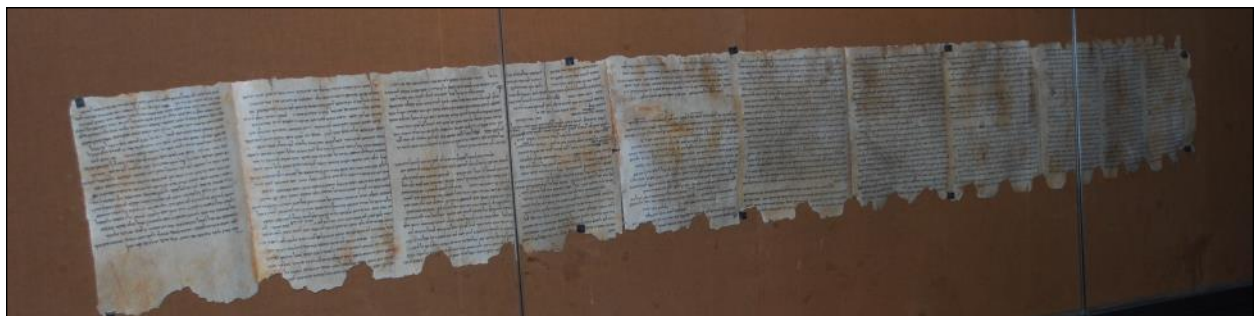
Cave 4 at Qumran



Cave 4 at Qumran



Several types of manuscripts were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, including: most of the books of the Old Testament, targums (Aramaic paraphrases), commentaries (*pesharim*) on some books of the Old Testament, apocryphal and pseudepigraphal books, sectarian documents, hymns and prayers, and letters. For many years, a large percentage of the scrolls remained secret and unpublished. Today, translations of the scrolls have made them accessible to the world.



Replica of a Scroll at Qumran



Scroll Jar from Qumran
(Oriental Institute Museum/University of Chicago)



Replicas of Scrolls and Jars at Qumran

Shrine of the Book. Many of the Dead Sea Scrolls are housed in the Shrine of the Book, which is located on the grounds of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. The central display is a replica of the great Isaiah Scroll, which contains all 66 chapters. It is 23 feet long and made of parchment that is sewn together. The genuine Isaiah scroll predates our oldest copy of the Masoretic Text by 1,000 years. Other display items that are rotated include the Psalms Scroll, War Scroll, Temple Scroll, and Manual of Discipline.

The Shrine of the Book is unique because of its shape. The design, which was made by American architects, is a large representation of the lid of an ancient pottery jar. It replicates the lids of the clay jars that were used to preserve the Dead Sea Scrolls. Another interesting design is the entrance of the Shrine of the Book, which resembles the passage of a cave. This feature was incorporated to remind people of the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found.

Outside the shrine is a reflecting pool, as well as a black basalt wall. This dark wall stands in sharp contrast to the white roof of the shrine (part of the building is underground). This contrast is representative of the conflict between the “sons of light” and the “sons of darkness,” which appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls.



Shrine of the Book (Above) and Contrasting Wall (Below)

